



**Jared Golden**  
Congress of the United States  
2nd District of Maine

June 5, 2019

Dr. Richard A. Stone, M.D.  
Executive in Charge  
Veterans Health Administration  
United States Department of Veterans Affairs  
8100 Vermont Avenue Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20571

Dear Dr. Stone,

Thank you for your service to veterans as the Veterans Health Administration Executive in Charge. Your dedication and leadership are greatly appreciated by veterans in Maine and across the nation.

A particular area of concern for Maine veterans is access to adequate mental health services. The Togus VA Medical Center (Togus) is the only VA medical center in Maine, and currently lacks long-term treatment beds for veterans seeking mental health or substance abuse treatment. Veterans who check in at Togus and require long-term inpatient services are sent to other medical centers out of state, often a considerable distance from Maine.

This lack of local mental health services presents a tough choice for Maine veterans who seek mental health care: either receive care far away from their family and support networks or forego evaluation and treatment out of concern for having to leave their communities.

The lack of meaningful mental health services in Maine is not unique to the VA, as there is also a lack of private long-term mental health services available for veterans in our state. Even if Maine had sufficient private providers, however, that would be no substitute for Maine veterans being able to receive these critical services from the VA because VA providers are better trained and experienced to help veterans overcome the unique challenges that can stem from combat service.

This unacceptable situation has gone on far too long. Togus urgently needs the ability to provide veterans with long-term inpatient care for mental health or substance use problems. I request that the VA develop a plan to offer these services at Togus as soon as possible. Specifically, I would like to see a proposal that includes:

- 1) Background data regarding the number of Maine veterans that have been prescribed or otherwise recommended to seek mental health or substance abuse evaluation or treatment outside of Maine;
- 2) Information concerning the criteria utilized to determine where Maine veterans seeking mental health or substance abuse evaluation or treatment are sent;
- 3) An explanation of whether or not the VA has plans to offer long-term inpatient care services for mental health and substance abuse at Togus, and if so, a timeline for such plans;
- 4) If such plans can be made, an explanation of whether these programs could be established on a permanent or only temporary basis; and
- 5) If such services cannot be offered, a description of the obstacles that currently prevent the VA from offering long-term inpatient services at Togus for mental health and substance abuse.

I appreciate any additional information you are able to provide in responding to this matter, and I hope to remain in close coordination with your office to provide assistance as necessary. This issue is a top priority for my district and the entire state. Your response by Friday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019 would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for assisting us with this planning and additional information and for all of your work serving veterans in Maine and across the entire country.

Very Respectfully,



Jared F. Golden  
Member of Congress